

# SOUTH LANE SCHOOL DISTRICT 45J3

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October 24, 2019

Parents and Students of South Lane School District,

I want to take the opportunity to address all South Lane students and families about a recent incident at Cottage Grove High School.

On September 27<sup>th</sup>, a report was made to our high school administration about hazing/harassment in the locker room involving football players. As the administrators initially responded promptly and investigated the allegations, it became clear that in addition to inappropriate school behavior, there may have been a crime committed. The high school administrators immediately contacted the police, and both the district and police department immediately began separate investigations. By the end of the day on September 27<sup>th</sup>, the administrators had progressed far enough into the investigation to determine and carry out initial consequences for several students.

The high school continued the investigation over the next two weeks to ensure that they were thorough in their investigation, and that the findings of the investigation were accurate. We were deeply upset by the actions of the students involved in this incident, and the high school administration addressed the actions of the students involved with consistent, and appropriate consequences.

There have been questions about why we didn't publicize this issue earlier, or why we did not provide more details about the students involved. In the weeks following the report of the incident, we didn't communicate out about the issue because there were two ongoing investigations by the district and police department, and communicating before the completion of those investigations may have slowed or hindered those investigations. We did not provide more details about the students involved because we have an obligation to protect the privacy of our students, not only in this instance, but at all times. This includes student discipline, and includes ALL students. This limits what we can and cannot share with parents and the public. However, in hindsight, we could have communicated with parents, students, and the community at the end of our investigation, and failed to do so. We are a small community, and communicating earlier may have prevented the misconceptions and misunderstandings of what actually happened that have surfaced. The reports of rape and other sexual crimes and actions are an example of this, as these reports are not consistent with the findings of our investigation. While again we are limited in what we can share, we regret not communicating about this serious issue earlier.

We have also heard questions about what we are doing to ensure that this incident does not happen again. As we released in a statement earlier this week, we have already taken the following steps:

- Modified locker room supervision to more closely monitor student athletes
- Addressed the football team, and reviewed the expectations with regards to hazing, harassment and bullying.
- Planned future sessions with all sports teams about the expectations of hazing, harassment, and bullying that will include clear expectations to report any inappropriate behavior to coaches or the athletic director immediately.

In addition to these measures, we are also considering hiring a consultant to work with our student athletes and staff on these expectations and effective supervision.

As educators, we know that our students will perform better academically, athletically, and in life when they feel and are safe at school. We know that as parents, you entrust us with your students, and expect them to be safe. We know the part that we must play in preventing issues like this, and we will continue to make student safety our priority.

Sincerely,



Larry Sullivan, PhD  
Superintendent